# GODSOL—ADVENTURER IN FINANCE

## Extradition Demanded on Charge of Receiving $1,500,000 Excess Commissions on Motor Trucks Bought in U. S. for French Army

## American Born Adventurer Started With Nothing and Made $20,000,000 on Imitation Jewels in World Encircling Enterprise

By Athos O'Brien

FRANK J. GODSOL, American born French citizen, who was charged by the French government with wrongfully obtaining about $1,500,000 in commissions on motor trucks bought here by the government, and who has been fighting extradition since March 6, was released from prison this week by Justice Gould, of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia.

Godsol, who will remain at Washington to meet any new steps taken in the case, has had a very sensational career. His extraordinary business ability was shown early in life.

If Father Goldsoll had not been a believer in intensive cultivation of intellect; if he had not tried to prove his theory that it is possible to manufacture a mental prodigy by cramming the brain of a first-year high school boy with higher mathematics, music, the dead languages, Russian philosophy and Talmudic lore, the career of his elder son, Frank Joseph, might have been different.

Frank Joseph might not have left Cleveland without a goodby to become famous in Butte, Mont., as the boy breaker of faro banks. Instead he might have remained to develop the goat cart express into a competitor of Wells-Fargo, or "The Scholars' Weekly" into a vast publishing business.

Also he might not have gone to France or been mobilized into the army of Papa Joffre as a naturalized citizen of the French Republic. In that case his selling of motor trucks to the French government on commission probably would not have given the Paris Chamber of Deputies the "Affair Godsol," which is now agitating it. Nor would he in consequence have ever become a prisoner of the district jail at Washington, battling to frustrate an effort to take him back to France.

But no power on earth could have prevented him from becoming a millionaire. He was born with the Midas touch.

At fifteen he was making $200 a month.

At twenty-five he was living at the rate of $100,000 a year.

At thirty he had belted the world with a close knit organization of young Americans, Englishmen and Frenchmen who, with the help of human vanities, transmuted various "little ideas" into gold.

And now at forty-four his total "gatherings" amount to between $15,000,000 and $20,000,000, a large part of which he has spent with the disdain of one to whom money comes without effort or coaxing and means only something to spend.

### Invaded Europe With Only $1,200

Godsol, as he has been known since 1915, has been "broke" on occasion. He invaded Europe twenty years ago with less than $1,200. He had never crossed the ocean before. He knew no one abroad. Nevertheless, in six months . . . but that comes later.

Until his enforced rest in the Washington prison began last March, pending the outcome of the extradition proceedings instituted by the French Ambassador, he slept an average of four hours a day, preferably in daylight. Yet his tall, carefully tailored figure is still slim, and he looks years younger than his age. His gray eyes are not the keen sort usually associated with the maker of big money. They look tired. His close cut, curling blond hair is getting rather thin.

Godsol, after making millions in imitation pearls and diamonds, motion picture and theatrical enterprises throughout the world, was called to the colors when France went to war in 1914. He was a private assigned to drive the automobile of General Faurie, an inspector general of the French forces. But through his business organization in Paris he obtained from various American automobile manufacturers contracts to sell on a commission basis motor trucks to the French government.

### Said to Have Made $4,500,000

From these commissions he has made approximately $4,500,000 since the war began. This is the fact, although the New York State Attorney General, who has been investigating him, has asserted that his commissions amounted to twice that.

The charge is that he misrepresented to the manufacturers that they could sell only through him, and that he robbed France in one instance of $1,563,103, by causing a manufacturer to add his commissions to the price charged the French government. To this Godsol answers that the trucks he sold to France cost less after he had obtained his commission contract than before. He asserts that the whole matter is the result of one of the perennial political battles in Paris.

And he is frankly worried by this political phase. How seriously it has been regarded is indicated by the fact that William J. Bryan and other men well known in the political life of this country have been interested in the case—seeking interviews with Secretary Lansing of the State Department, who will have final say as to the honoring of France's requisition—while former Senator Joseph Weldon Bailey, as chief counsel, looks after the court end.

On the other side of the water there have been violent debates in the Chamber of Deputies, where M. Thomas, former Minister of Munitions, has been vigorously attacked as Godsol's sponsor, although the latter declares he has seen Thomas but twice in his life.

The debate was on a proposed resolution requesting the French government "to make known the accomplices of the adventurer Godsol" and who was responsible for having permitted him to avoid his military duties.

In the debate it was brought out that Godsol was made courier to a general in August, 1914; was arrested at the front as an espionage suspect and later as an automobilist attached to General Faurie. He obtained a permit to go to Turin, although Italy was not then at war. From Turin he telegraphed every day to his agents in Berlin, where he had a cinematograph business, and later was sent as interpreter to the French purchasing mission in the United States.

### Charges Schools With His Troubles

But serious though Godsol's present predicament may be, it is really only an interlude, an incident, in a career that was amazing long before the beginning of the world war made him think of army trucks as a means of making millions.

Godsol was born July 11, 1874, the elder of two sons of Schulman Goldsoll, a manufacturing jeweller, who left the Russian Pale in the late sixties and settled in Cleveland.

And feverishly athirst for knowledge himself, he determined when his sons were born that they should be highly educated. For the elder, Frank, whom Broadway knows as "Joe" and the Paris boulevards as "Chere Joe," he laid out a regimen designed to give him all the education there was.

"I never had a playmate," said Godsol in the Washington jail the other day, while he and his wife, whom he married in Newark last December, worked over the volumes of documents and data which he had assembled to refute the French charges. "I am not an angel. Had things been otherwise I might not have been more angelic than I am. But my life probably would have been different, more orthodox, more conventional.

"Mind, I am not excusing myself. That is not to say that I have wronged France, or done anything for which I could be prosecuted criminally. I haven't. But there are things I've done that I am ashamed of. That is true of every man. But you know—you get started a certain way and you just go on."

And then he explained:

"I went to school almost from the time I could walk. After the day in school I came home to more classes—Latin, Greek, special tutors in modern languages and science, violin lessons. But what good did they do me? I cannot play a note. And when I was naturalized in France one of the officials said: 'Ha, a Frenchman who cannot speak French!'

"When the other boys were on the greens or back lots playing I was at work on special lessons. Then, after finishing with the special tutors, I had to spend part of the night getting up the regular lessons for school next day."

### He Published The "Scholars' Weekly"

Godsol attributes his extraordinary success as a money maker to his appreciation of the little ideas which other men pass over and to his ability as an organizer. He early displayed both faculties. His original "little idea" was the goat-cart express. That was in the early '80s.

In those days there were central markets in Cleveland. Neither men nor women were ashamed to be seen with market baskets. Louis Goldsoll, Frank's younger brother, had a goat and wagon, and Frank conceived the notion that if they went with the wagon to market they could get a load of baskets to deliver before school. Soon loads and receipts grew sufficiently to justify the employment of a number of goat wagons, which they got other boys to handle for the pleasure of driving a goat.

But as soon as Father Goldsoll learned what his boys were doing he suppressed the budding express business.

And then came the adventure of "The Scholars' Weekly," which had a fine start, and might have been going yet had not the elder Goldsoll been unalterably opposed to any activity not connected with the acquiring of education. Frank, then about fourteen years old, started the paper. He organized every school. For each he appointed an editor, who in turn named editors and reporters for every room. They got up all the copy and then sold the papers—all free of charge, their remuneration being the pleasure of seeing their names in print. In a few months Frank had his own printing plant.

With no overhead and a large staff, but no payroll, he was coining money. But again Father Goldsoll interfered. The weekly was taking up time that might better be spent in studying Greek and Latin and learning the violin.

"The Weekly" thereupon expired. The printing plant was sold, and, determined to have done once for all with dead languages, fiddle lessons and the harassments of special tutors, Frank took part of the money and left home without leave.

Butte was his magnet. The rich copper veins of Montana were just beginning to yield up their treasures to Daly, Heinze and former Senator Clark. The name of Montana seemed always to have a fascination for him. One of his greatest successes years later he named "Montana Diamond."

"I got a job in a jewelry shop," he said. "It paid me $9 a week. I was fifteen then, and I was everything in the place—janitor, clerk, window washer and mediator between two warring partners.

"I was ambitious, and it was not long before I knew more about the business than those two hostile and lazy men did. In a short time they dissolved partnership. Each wanted me. I was looking out for myself, and got them to bidding against each other for my services. Finally I agreed to stay with the one who offered $200 a month."

Here was a boy just turned fifteen, with $50 a week in a town where gambling was the chief recreation of the population, which spent its days digging wealth out of the ground. Of course he gambled.

"Who could help it?" he demands. "Over here a business man loses credit if he is known to gamble. Over there in those days a man had no credit unless he did gamble. Everybody played. The man who introduced me to faro was the cashier of the bank. 'Come on, boy,' he said to me, 'let's win dinner money.'

"That was the way it was—playing for dinner money or anything else, staking a week's income, a prospect, a fortune, or honor and life itself, on the turn of a card or the fall of the dice. Soon I could play with any of them. And, fortuniately, I won."

In two years he had accumulated $25,000 or $30,000 dollars. He owned a jewelry store. His father died in 1891. At his mother's solicitation he came back East and with Louis took charge of the jewelry manufacturing business in Cleveland.

### Gambled in Butte And Won $30,000

And in a little while he got another little idea which originated the specialty game in the jewelry trade, and was in fact the leading string to the imitation gem business with which he literally belted the world.

But that did not come until, yielding to the gaming spirit bred in the Montana mining fields, he took a flier on the race courses of the East. It has been reported in print and otherwise that he "welched" once for a large amount while running a book. That is not true. It was a sore spot with him last summer when he had five cottages at Saratoga filled with guests and was betting $5,000 to $10,000 on a race—and winning. The fact is that a cashier decamped with his "bankroll," amounting to about $25,000, but he paid every dollar of it, leaving himself with the $1,200 with which he invaded Europe in 1899.

That, however, is a little in advance. To get back to his specialty idea. It was simply a forerunner of the plan adopted generally since in all lines of trade of inducing customers to pay more for goods by doing them up in fancy packages. He tells how it germinated thus:

"My father's line included about everything in jewelry. On the road as travelling salesman I had to carry a couple of trunks.

"I didn't want to be loaded down with trunks. I wanted something also that I could talk enthusiastically about. It occurred to me that if I could pick out some one thing I could make a winner of it. So I began to think.

"Watch chains! It came to me all of a sudden. We had a line of chains, ordinary plated ware, but lasting. I had a large quantity of them numbered. Then I had warranty certificates engraved and numbered, one for each chain, guaranteeing each purchaser a refund for any chain that did not last five or ten years, I forget which. I had them arranged on black velvet in lots of twenty-four, in attractive cases of wood and glass. Then I raised the price and went out selling. My entire sample line consisted of one case. I never sold less than one case of twenty-four. Every jeweler bought, and every one sold guaranteed chains like 'hot dogs' at a Coney Island picnic."

But the watch chain bonanza did not last long for the Goldsoll brothers. A resurgence of the fever caught at the Butte faro tables and roulette wheels afflicted Frank. "Louie" also became infected. "He was born with the desire to take a chance," says Frank. Between the two the Goldsoll partnership was wrecked.

### Initiates New Diamond Idea

With $100, the sum total of his available assets, Frank thereupon renewed his quest of fortune alone. Then was born his imitation diamond idea—Tait, Montana, Saretecora, Brazilian. Take your choice. They are all the names of the same "diamond." Next to his Tecla pearl, the invention which has enabled women of wealth all over the world to appear collared, coroneted and tiaraed as usual while their real pearls repose in safety vaults, this was undoubtedly Godsol's best "little idea." But in discussing it the other day he remarked regretfully that it was the thing that convinced him Barnum was right. "There is one born every minute."

"Part of that $100 bought a barrel of them," he said. "I really didn't intend to sell them for a dollar each. Honest I didn't. I priced them at a dollar so I could truthfully advertise 'Were $1 now 80 cents,' 'Were $1, now 70 cents,' and so on down to a dime. But the first day I took in $60. In a week the line-up was blocking the sidewalk. My clerks were robbing me blind, but in spite of that, before the month was ended, I was taking in $600 a day. What could I do then? Cut down to a dime?"

### People Blocked Sidewalks to Buy

No sane business man would and Godsol didn't, but he says that he had so little understanding of human nature at that time that he hired a store in Cincinnati for only a month. He figured that he would sell a few quarts of the "diamonds" in thirty days, which would be about the limit, and then he would move on. He did move on, to St. Louis, to Detroit, to Rochester and to various other small cities, because he did not believe a sophisticated city like New York would stand for it. But when he finally did arrive here he remained for months—on Fourteenth Street—and Brother Louie, who cribbed the idea and followed him, remained several years.

The Montana diamond scheme depended entirely upon window dressing. It still does, though helped immensely by extensive advertising. Witness the great mirror-lined, light-festooned "diamond palaces" which Godsol's associates conducted in Europe before the war, and are still conducting in the Far East.

When he arrived in Cincinnati Godsol found that there was only one vacant store place on a busy corner to be had and a dime museum man had beaten him to it. He had to sub-lease the store from the museum man, at an advance rental, for one month, and at the end of the period he was forced to give it up and forego the run of $600 days because the showman had his freaks in town and no other place to put them.

Rent took most of what was left of his $100 after he had bought a barrel or two of "diamonds." The slender balance he expended for richly purpled crepe paper, mirrors to line his show window and a cylinder made of mirrors and a motor to turn it. He arranged with the electric company to supply scores of incandescent bulbs to flood-light the window. The paper he laid billowing over packing cases and shoe boxes scattered about in the window to break its four-square austerity.

Then he studded the mirrored cylinder with "diamonds" and set it in the centre of the window. He sprinkled more of the gems among the folds and billows of the purple crepe paper. It was a night's work, but by daylight he had a display that was dazzling under the rays of the cleverly concealed window lights.

"As I said, I did not believe anybody would buy at $1. I named that figure so that when I cut the price they would look like real bargains. You know—'Were $1, now 50 cents.' But on my word I hadn't been open ten minutes before I had a customer. And there were fifty-nine others before I closed that night.

"Next day there were a hundred, the next two hundred. Before the week was ended I was averaging five or six hundred dollars a day. The sidewalk was blocked, especially at night when the lights made the window literally blaze."

### He Packed the House in New York

He next hired a place on Olive Street at $1,500 a month and bought rich purple and black velvet instead of crepe paper, and bevelled mirrors instead of plain silvered glass for his window dressings.

He engaged the place for ninety days. He could have remained six months or a year, but he was still unconvinced of the staying qualities of the imitation diamond business. And here a curious little quirk of Godsol's business character cropped up. He decided it was wrong to take dollars for stuff that cost only a few cents, and he stocked up with a better grade on which the profit was only 100 per cent.

"I also put in a line of real goods," he says, "but that was a mistake. I found that people would rather pay $10 for an imitation gem set in plated ware than $100 for a real stone mounted in gold.

"If I hadn't been a fool," he lamented, "I would have struck out at once for New York. Ultimately I made more money here than anywhere else in America. But at that time I was afraid of the big town."

In Detroit he evolved the "Diamond Palace," with mahogany furnishings, tapestries, heavy velvet hangings and crystal electroliers. He adopted the policy of big space advertising, and again tried to use the imitation gems as leaders to the real jewelry counters, but once more found that cheapness was preferred to genuineness.

Thence he went to Rochester, and a few months later began his New York career. His "Diamond Palace" here was established in Fourteenth Street, near Fifth Avenue, next to an art gallery.

Again he "packed the house." For months he coined money. Then he yielded to the call of the green baize tables, and harkened to the hoofbeats of the racers on the metropolitan courses.

New York then was a "wide open town." A man could find anything he looked for. Canfield was in his heyday then. Young millionaires from Pittsburgh were being trimmed nightly in gilded palaces of chance. Farmers from New Jersey and New England were investing daily in Brooklyn Bridge shares. Engaging confidence men were doing a land office business in polished brass cubes stamped "100 per cent gold."

Godsol, forever seeking the hectic excitements he had known in Butte, soon found Canfield's. He found other places.

### Starts Business In London Store

Soon he became acquainted with Ed Harrigan, a bookmaker temporarily out of business. He bought for Harrigan a membership in the Metropolitan Turf Association. That entitled Harrigan to make books in the betting rings. Bad selections as a bettor had already depleted his roll. The operations of the Harrigan book were not as successful as anticipated. The roll steadily lost weight, and finally Godsol went to bookmaking alone.

That was along in the summer of 1898. The season had just begun at Saratoga. That is a period Godsol does not like to talk about. A trusted relative was his cashier. One day, when he was widely extended on a long shot that won, the cashier disappeared, taking with him about $25,000, practically every dollar he had left after a rather disastrous campaign.

From one friend, a judge in Cleveland, Godsol, by telegraph, obtained a loan of $12,000. He went South to raise more money and wound up in New Orleans, where he again went into business as a "Montana diamond" merchant to make the balance he needed to pay off his obligations.

By the spring of 1899 he had all he needed. Through "Ike" Blumenthal, now one of his organization in Europe, he paid out $25,000, and with the $1,200 remaining he went to England.

Frank Godsol had nothing to do with his brother's business. He played a lone hand after the break in Cleveland until he went to Europe. He landed in London with but little money and absolutely unacquainted. Yet within three months, after spending most of his funds for living expenses at the highest priced hotel of the British capital, he had established a big business there.

How he did it would be a mystery unless one has talked with him. Then it becomes clear. Godsol is quiet. There is nothing "cocky" about him. His eyes are level, and he talks frankly. While you understand that he will try his best to trim you if you show a desire to match wits, he gives the impression that he is perfectly willing to lay his cards on the table if you turn up yours. Briefly, he inspires confidence; he radiates a feeling of security and strength. A number of wealthy Englishmen—Lord Tenterdon is now one of the directors of the Tecla Company—simply caught this feeling and backed him.

A number of people have been badly mistaken in Godsol recently. That quiet manner of his and his reputation as a spender have put upon his trail a flock of human birds of prey since the French government filed its charges against him.

"You see, it's this way with me," he explained a little later. "I'll pay $100 for something that's worth only a dime if I want to. Friends can have anything I've got, but friends are the very ones I find that I can give nothing to. I'll tip a taxi pilot ten times the amount of his bill, but let him overcharge me a dime and he'll have to fight for it. These birds make me laugh. . . . I am never trimmed unless I want to be."

Godsol's venture in England was not attended by the street blocking interest he had aroused in America. His London establishment was more elaborate than any he or his brother had had over here. He spent more than $25,000 on interior decorations alone, and laid out vast sums in advertising campaigns. Yet the business he did was smaller than that he had enjoyed in the United States. "The English are too conservative," he explains.

He made money, but not fast enough, and he sold out, but not before several Germans had become interested in his methods, and offered him 50 per cent of the gross if he would establish similar businesses, on their capital in Munich, Berlin, Stuttgart and other cities of Germany.

"They seemed to think I had invented something and held a patent on it," he said. "Naturally, I accepted." And from that day to the outbreak of the war, when nearly $1,000,000 worth of his property, represented by theatres and motion picture houses in Germany, were sequestrated or confiscated because he was a naturalized citizen of France, he drew large dividends from these paste gem emporiums.

### Gathered a Good Field Staff

Before going to Germany to establish these places, however, he had gathered around him in England a coterie of keen, young Americans, Britishers and Frenchmen, to whom he afterward gave interests in his various enterprises, based on the amount of business they produced. These included F. S. Higgins and Cyril Devere—the latter his wife's brother who conducted the motor truck transactions with the French army administration, which later became the basis of the charges laid against their chief, and Ike and Ben Blumenthal, of New York. The Blumenthals specialized in theatrical and motion picture ventures. They also operated the various branches of the imitation gem business established throughout the world.

In Paris, in 1905, he staged his Tecla pearl performance, a really astinishing achievement. Godsol himself says the motor truck affair was a fortuitous accident of business, whereas Tecla afforded a full display of his peculiar genius and the daring quality of his imagination.

Shortly after he had reached Paris and quartered himself at the most expensive hotel, there appeared in the Paris edition of "The New York Herald" a special article dealing with modern methods of producing synthetic gems.

A day or two later "The Herald" printed a letter over the signature of the "Count de V——," in which the count took issue with the statements made in the article with reference to pearls. The count declared that he had the honor of knowing a renowned scientist who had produced a perfect pearl by chemical processes. The scientist was not named, and a day or two later "The Herald" carried another letter under another signature asking if the "Count de V——" would be so good as to name the pearlmaker, and state whether his product was being made in commercial quantities. Thereupon the count replied that the producer was none other than the "world-famed American scientist, Professor Maurice de Tecla," who because of his absorption in the pursuit of knowledge had never before considered commercial possibilities. Now, however, that phase of his wonderful discovery had been brought to his attention, and upon a certain day in the near future it had been arranged to have a public exhibition.

### Tecla Pearl Goes on Exhibition

Then followed notices of the exhibition. The display was made by the renowned professor, and shortly thereafter a vigorous advertising campaign launched the Tecla Pearl successfully in the jewelry trade. He was the head of the Tecla business when it started, and still is the managing director of the $1,500,000 stock company organized with Lord Tenterdon and others in England more than five years ago to exploit the pearl.

Branches in the interim were established all over the world, the one in New York being on Fifth Avenue, and from them Godsol and his associates are said to have been drawing several hundred thousand dollars a year.

Godsol visited this country several times prior to the war and bought interests in the theatrical enterprises of Al. H. Wood and the Shuberts. He now holds, among other stage interests, a 50 per cent share of the Astor Theatre.

Abroad he became the commercial director of the Ambrosio Film Company, of Turin, Italy, and distributed throughout the world the big picture, "Quo Vadis."

### Buying Autos For French Army

In 1911 he became a citizen of France, intending, he says, to remain there for the rest of his life. Just before the war began he was in Germany, establishing picture houses and vaudeville theatres. When hostilities opened, however, he was mobilized in the French army, and having had no military training, but being an expert motorist, he was assigned as driver for Inspector General Faurie.

In the meantime his holdings in Germany had been seized. Business in France was paralyzed. Then followed the train of incidents that led up to his entrance into the business of selling army motor trucks. Of this phase of his career Godsol gives a summary thus:

"Nobody seemed to realize when the war began what a pressing need motor transport would be. Our organization had been busy trying to sell blankets, uniform cloth and barbed wire without success. When I looked over the automobile field I found that the French factories were engaged exclusively on munitions.

"So Higgins was sent to Turin where Ambrosio introduced him to the Fiat people, and we got a contract to sell five hundred trucks. That was the largest single order ever before placed in Europe. Then, believing that the Fiat factory could not produce trucks in the quantities that probably would be needed, we proceeded to obtain representations in America."

In America the Godsol organization made a number of contracts, among others with the Jeffery company, of Kenosha, and the Pierce Arrow at Buffalo. Then he proceeded to have the French army administration informed in writing of his business connections, and the curious part of the entire affair is that while he has been in jail in Washington, Higgins, Devere and his other associates, who conducted all transactions for him, have continued to do business with the French government in his behalf, and are still operating the Godsol workshops in Paris with working staffs composed entirely of French soldiers released from the firing lines especially for that purpose.

Godsol points to that in refutation of the allegation that he worked under cover. To the charge that he operated through the collusion of M. Thomas and of certain officers in the War Department, he answers that the personnel of the government has been constantly changing, and that, consequently, if he had been in the habit of bribing he would have had to corrupt not two or three men, as alleged, but literally scores.

In rebuttal of the further accusation that he claimed, when making commission contracts, to have the upper hand in the Paris War Department, he points out that other American motor companies, working independently, have been selling machines to France, and that one in particular has sold as many machines as he has.

"If I had the monopoly they say I have," he says, "do you think independents would have had a chance?"

As a matter of fact, Godsol, who has been in this country off and on since 1915, returned to France in 1916 to face the identical charges now pending against him, and was exonerated.

For that reason he is convinced that their revival at this time is only part of a political manœuvre to strike through him at M. Thomas, the former Minister of Munitions, who sent him here first, after a physical breakdown incapacitated him for military service of any sort.

His purpose at that time, he declares, was to obtain price reductions on motor trucks for France, which, he claims, has been and still is paying too much. But the purchasing commission to which he was assigned refused to permit him to act. This is another thing which Godsol thinks tends to show the political character of the case against him.

"And knowing," he says, "that I would be sacrificed to the political ambitions of M. Thomas's foes, I am determined to beat these charges on this side of the water if I can. I love France. I am not a sentimental man. I cannot put tears either in my voice or eyes and talk of patriotism, la patrie or love of country. But I would do anything for my adopted land. Yet I won't go back, if I can prevent it, to serve as the meats at somebody's political funeral."

FRANK J. GODSOL
In his uniform as a French soldier